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Your e-mail account has been hacked: what to do in the first hour

Security

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Your e-mail account has been hacked: what to do in the first hour

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The short answer: change the password **from a clean device**, end the open sessions, look for and delete the **forwards and filters** the intruder left, and only then deal with the damage: warn your contacts and change the passwords of the accounts that use this e-mail for password recovery. Order matters: if you do not close the door first, everything else gets undone again.

How to tell it was hacked

Sign	What it means
Messages in “Sent” that you did not write	Someone sent in your name, typically to the whole contact list.
Friends and customers get odd links from you	Your account is being used to spread phishing.
A sign-in alert from another country or device	Someone got in. Check the date and place.
You cannot sign in, the password changed	The intruder changed it to lock you out.
Bounced messages you never sent	Mass sending through your mailbox, often the only early clue.

The first hour, in order

1. **Check the device you are working from.** If the password was stolen by a program on your computer, changing it from there is no use. Use another device, or clean this one first.

2. **Change the password** to a long, unique one (see **a strong password and a password manager**). For a mailbox created in cPanel, see **how to change an e-mail account password**; if you can no longer get in, **how to recover an e-mail account password**.

3. **End the other sessions** and remove unknown devices, if your mail service has that option. Switch on two-step verification where available.

4. **Look for what the intruder left behind.** In “Forwarders” and “Email Filters” in cPanel, or in the Roundcube filters, delete any rule you did not create: they usually copy everything that arrives to an address of theirs, or delete your contacts’ replies so you do not notice. See **filters in Roundcube**.

5. **Check the signature, the reply-to address and the folders** for drafts and trash, where they may have deleted or hidden messages.

6. **Change the passwords of accounts that depend on this e-mail:** My Interweb, the bank, social networks, the shop. Whoever has your e-mail can request a password reset for all of them. Start with the most important.

7. **Warn your contacts.** A short message through another channel: “do not open links sent from my e-mail between such and such a time”.

! **If it was your company e-mail,**

the greater damage may be to those who trusted the messages. Check whether invoices or payment requests were sent with different accounts. See whether your server ended up on a blocklist: **your server IP on a blocklist**.

When all is calm, put in place what would have saved you: a long, unique password, two-step verification and a recovery e-mail **outside** your domain. It is all explained in **locked out: password, two-step authentication and the recovery e-mail**.

NEED A HAND?

Is the mailbox on your account with us and you cannot get in, or are messages going out that you did not send? Write to us now.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **A strong password and a password manager**
- **How to change an e-mail account password**
- **How to recover an e-mail account password**
- **Your server IP on a blocklist: how to tell and how to get off**

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